



Mississippi Department of Human Services

Press Release

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MDHS Investigators SNAP Welfare Fraud

(Columbia, Miss.) — Mississippians support helping struggling families put food on the table, but they also want to know their taxpayer dollars are spent wisely. The Mississippi Department of Human Services, Fraud Unit investigates those enrolled in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to ensure the integrity of the nation's first line of defense against hunger.

Friday, June 26, state investigators from the Fraud Unit, and the Marion County Sheriff's Department served warrants on six individuals accused of SNAP fraud.

Arrested include: Theresa Haddox, Foxworth; Tanya Upton, Kokomo; Laken Cox, Judith Priest, Joanna Thornhill and Joy Thornhill from Morgantown.

SNAP and TANF fraud are usually the result of a client withholding income or household information that could deem them ineligible to receive benefits. Disqualification periods for SNAP fraud can range from 12 months for the first violation to permanent disqualification. Ineligibility is determined by state and federal mandates and can be ordered by the courts as part of sentencing.

MDHS Director of Fraud Investigations Kenneth Palmer said, "SNAP is designed to help low-income people make food purchases for their families. SNAP fraud, however, hurts everyone. Local stores where purchases would have been made suffer a loss of revenue and, of course, the family suffers because they are disqualified from a program which would have allowed for appropriate food purchases."

Small "mom and pop" grocers are usually the type of stores targeted by those trying to defraud a system in place to help those who are at risk of food insecurity, such as the elderly and children. Local residents can help spot fraud in their grocery stores.

If you suspect a store owner, clerk or client is misusing SNAP benefits, call the Fraud hotline at 1-800-299-6905. SNAP fraud is a crime.

SNAP FACTS FOR SFY 2014

- 21.9 percent of Mississippians enrolled in SNAP.
- More than \$938 million in benefits issued in the state
- 21.6 percent of Marion County residents enrolled in SNAP
- More than \$8.3 million in benefits issued in the county

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